



Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association

**HEDSA**

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*Accepted as a community of practice by Universities South Africa.  
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Dear HEDSA Colleagues and Friends,

### **ANOTHER OVERDUE NEWSFLASH!!**

Let's hope my successor will be less tardy about these things! However, the good thing is that we have news from several of our member institutions to include in this first bumper Newsflash for 2016.

### **FIRST THINGS FIRST... THE UPCOMING SYMPOSIUM:**

We have extended the Early Bird Conference Fee deadline to the end of April for the symposium scheduled to take place on 24-25 November at the Spier Conference Centre in Stellenbosch, Cape Town. One reason for extending the Early Bird deadline is that we had not yet been ready to distribute a provisional programme, but hope to rectify that very shortly. Our overarching theme this year will be to focus specifically on supporting students and staff with mental health challenges, deaf students for whom SASL is their primary language of communication and on Assistive Technology. In our previous symposium there was a lot of focus on AT for students with sensory disabilities and we thought it's important to consider assistive technology and human support for students with significant mobility impairments.

Still on the subject of Reasonable Accommodation we will discuss the latest policy documents rolling from our government presses as they impact on support for staff and students with disabilities in the Higher and TVET sector. We are determined to ensure a meaty programme with high-level input and implementable information.

Remember also that HEDSA's Biennial General Meeting will form part of the symposium, during which the Executive for the next two years will be elected. It may be early days but you would be well advised to start thinking already about the best people to nominate. And be sure as you deliberate about this that you take into account that being on the HEDSA Exco is really, really hard work. It takes hours and hours of your time outside of work hours. It is also vital that the people you nominate to particular positions have the skills necessary to fill these demanding positions i.e.; the treasurer has to have experience of managing financial matters, banking, financial reporting etc. The secretary needs to be highly organised, pay meticulous attention to detail, have good general writing skills, minute taking and report writing skills.

For more information regarding the symposium please contact Kaylyn Alexander on [hedsa.secretariat@gmail.com](mailto:hedsa.secretariat@gmail.com) or 074 909 4546.

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## THE DISABILITY SERVICE PROFESSIONALS PROGRAMME



USB-ED in collaboration with HEDSA promoted diversity and inclusiveness during the month of March through the offering of the Disability Service Professionals Programme in Gauteng.

The Disability Service Professionals Programme, a first for USB-ED and HEDSA, was aimed at stakeholders in both the further and higher education sectors. It was launched with much excitement on March 14th in Gauteng.



With the financial support of HEDSA, the first intake of 12 participants, engaged with us on a week-long course. The programme equipped participants with a working knowledge of strategy development, the challenging area of budgeting and fundraising, as well as critical understandings of reasonable accommodation and universal design. This was done through the lens of viewing disability as being part of diversity; as well as from a human rights perspective. Seen as an important focus area on the social transformation agenda of government, business and society, USB-ED now has a role to play in extending the programme to a broader target audience which includes HR Managers, Transformation Managers, CEOs, Diversity and Disability Managers, as well as Health and Wellness Practitioners with the second intake scheduled for later this year.

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Our aim was to learn from the participants, as much as we wanted to impart knowledge. And learn we did. We 'got it' when faculty, who themselves are people with disabilities, spoke to us about living in a world design for able-bodied people. We learnt that we are all complicit in exclusionary practices, albeit unintentionally.

We look forward to collaborating with USB-ED for their second intake in Cape Town, date to be confirmed.

### NEWS FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS...

The Disability Unit at North West University, Potchefstroom Campus has shared a great success in that it has graduated its first deaf student who made use of a Sign Language Interpreter in BA Law. This was the unit's first client since being established in January 2013 and now he is graduating, that in itself being a 'wow' moment and undoubtedly a particularly proud moment for the current head of the unit, Blanch Carolus, who has been their throughout this journey, all your support and hard work was not in vain.

### Staying with North West University

The Disability Unit (Office for Students with Special Needs - OSSN) was implemented at Student Counselling and Development at North West University Vaal Triangle Campus on the 15th of June 2012. Since then the OSSN has developed into a unit that consists of 48 students with disabilities.

The unit is situated in the University's Library, building 13, Split Level 331 which is not only fully accessible to all students with disabilities, but also hosts a fully equipped disability room for the people who are Visually Impaired. The NWU website is also fully accessible to the people who are Visually Impaired.



To create awareness this unit hosts an annual Disability Day in liaison with the community to make fellow students, staff members and the general community more aware of the needs of people with disabilities.

Dr Sydney Vos, coordinator of the OSSN has also presented a paper on disabilities at an International Conference on Disabilities at Tel Aviv, Israel on 6 – 9 July 2015. Your initiative and hard work has not gone unnoticed Dr Vos.

### News from Stellenbosch University

South African cyclists, Ms Roxy Burns and Ms Toni Mould, wrote an interesting article on the challenges they have faced and the achievements they have reached as athletes with disabilities while training for events and cycling nationally and internationally. They also spoke of the support they received from SU staff which enabled their success. [Click here](#) to read this article. Burns is currently a postgraduate student while Mould is an alumnus.



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Mr Rynhardt Kruger, who is currently completing his PhD, wrote about his doctoral research regarding assistive technologies. [Click here](#) to read this article. He is the first blind student on campus to do such a study in computer science.



Mr Bongani Mapumulo, who uses a wheelchair, and his friend Mr Isibonelo Esihle Sosibo, who is able-bodied and also a SU student, wrote an article on disability from their perspectives. [Click here](#) to read this article.



*PULL-OUT QUOTE: "Disability does not make you exceptional, but questioning what you think you know about disability does." – Mr Bongani Mapumulo, a second-year student completing a BA degree in Social Dynamics. Mapumulo is pictured here with the Rector, Prof Wim de Villiers.*

### The Academic and support staff at Stellenbosch University

Articles were also written by SU staff members from the DU and AfriNEAD. Ms Marcia Lyner-Cleophas, the Head of the DU, wrote an article about innovation, which focused on how the Unit is supporting a deaf student by doing live captioning (in other words, providing her lecture in text format on her laptop in real time as the lecturer speaks) of classroom lectures for Ms Jody Bell, who requested verbatim class notes of her Genetics Honours class in 2015. [Click here](#) to read this article.

Dr Gubela Mji wrote an insightful article from an academic perspective on the need for disability inclusion across the curriculum. [Click here](#) to read this article.

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## The New Wits Disability Rights Unit

The New Wits Disability Rights Unit (DRU) in Senate House sets a best practice benchmark for Universal Design and an accessible environment for Higher Education in South Africa. These developments reflect the University's transformation drive to be accessible to a wide range of people including people with disabilities.

Thanks to generous funding from a private donor, relocation of the new DRU begun in mid-2015 and was completed for the start of the new academic year in 2016. We were fortunate to be given a much larger space by the university. This space allowed for more creativity from the universal access specialist, architect and the DRU team in designing a state-of-the-art unit.

We look forward to breaking new ground in disability support for students.

## Wits Campus Access Audit

The environmental accessibility audit of all the University buildings is almost completed and is currently underway at the remaining student residences. The audit reports will assist the University management in removing existing physical barriers and improving access to higher education environment for people with disabilities.

The University has adopted Universal Design standards including new signage standards, tactile paving for the vision-impaired and handrails as requirements for planned and future upgrading projects.

In both the design of our new unit and the campus access audits Wits used Hiten Bawa to assist us in the pursuit of a more accessible learning environment.

Hiten Bawa is an architect and urban designer at Ludwig Hansen Architects & Urban Designers with a focus on Universal Design consultancy. Hiten holds a Master of Architecture (Prof) degree from the University of Cape Town for his dissertation on using Universal Design principles to challenge the socio-cultural attitude towards people with disabilities.

He used his insights as a profoundly deaf person with bilateral cochlear implants to develop Universal Design standards in the built environment. With 2 years of experience, Hiten advises the Department of Higher Education & Training and Wits University on achieving barrier-free environments. He works closely with architects on providing reasonable accommodations in public spaces, workplaces and residential buildings.

## Renaming of the Disability Unit to Disability Rights Unit

We decided to rename the unit from "Disability Unit" to the "Disability Rights Unit" at the same time as we relocated. We would like to adapt this together with our "new beginning" in our state-of-the-art and fully universally accessible offices as the official name moving forward.

## Regarding why the term Disability Rights Unit rather than Disability Unit is preferred:

The right to equality and dignity and prohibition of discrimination is protected in the Constitution. Support that enables persons with disabilities to access and participate as equals in university life (inclusive of curricular and extra-curricular student life), is therefore a right, not a privilege (backed up by a number of court judgements which link reasonable accommodation support to the right to equality and dignity). The inclusion of the 'rights' component in the title therefore moves the purpose of the unit into the rights domain, rather than a 'welfare' domain.

Services on offer and housed in the Disability Rights Unit, are inclusive of a broader mandate, such as advocacy for changes to the curriculum to incorporate aspects of universal design and disability rights advocacy across all faculties.

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## NMMU's first blind graduate hopes others will follow suit

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's first completely blind graduate Xolisa Yekani, 37, is hoping other blind students will be inspired to follow his example.



"I am proud to be NMMU's first blind graduate, I advocate for other blind people because I want to bring about change," said Yekani, who graduated with his BA honours in Journalism,

"Thank you, NMMU, for opening your doors to us and catering for us totally blind students."

Sadly, Yekani was not always blind but lost his sight at the age of eight.

"I was a normal boy playing by the river with my friends, then suddenly I couldn't see."

It was later revealed that Yekani had lost his sight due to cataracts and, because they were left untreated, his corneas were permanently damaged.

"I come from a disadvantaged family and my parents could not afford to get proper medical care," said Yekani, who hails from the village of Dutywa in the Eastern Cape.

From 2011 to 2015, Yekani was the provincial chairperson for the South African National Council for the Blind and led a team that encouraged more universities to accept totally blind students to study at their institutions.

In 2014, he started studying at NMMU and decided that he would be a "living example" to help the blind students who would follow after him.

Yekani required all his reading material to be in electronic format. He uses Book Sense, a pocket-sized device converting all the letters to speech and a programme called Job Access With Speech (Jaws), which turns text on a computer to speech. He applauded all his lecturers for being accommodating to his needs.

"Fortunately I am very social so I spoke to all my fellow students and they assisted me to get around – my classmates understood me well and helped me. People will try to look down on you for being a disabled person, but you must be confident, work hard and be determined to prove them wrong, show them you can do it. Education is key especially when you are disabled."

As the eldest of five siblings, Yekani is also the first to graduate in his family.

"I brought my sister and my wife Bongwiwe to my graduation so they can be encouraged and motivated to get their education too."

He works as a current affairs producer for the SABC's isiXhosa radio station Umhlobo Wenene, in Port Elizabeth. He is also the chairperson of the Nkosinathi Foundation and for Blind and Partially-Sighted People.

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We would appreciate it if this information can be circulated to relevant departments at your institution so that HEDSA could continue to play an effective advocacy role in the higher education sector. You are welcome to visit our website <http://www.hedsa.org.za> for more information.

A reminder to our member institutions;

To meet our mandate and enable HEDSA to function effectively, we request an annual subscription fee of R1500 per Higher Education Institution to be paid.

Kindly direct any enquiries or invoice requests to [hedsa.secretariat@gmail.com](mailto:hedsa.secretariat@gmail.com)

We are looking forward to a lifelong relationship with your institution.

*Let me, in concluding this newsletter, urge colleagues to let us have news for this publication. Share with us your achievements, your challenges and your plans.*

With sincere best wishes

**REINETTE POPPLESTONE**

**HEDSA: Chair**

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